

## Aces of the 51st Fighter Wing

With its lineage dating back to 15 January 1941, the 51st Fighter Wing has compiled a distinguished combat record in two major conflicts – World War II and Korean War. Twenty pilots achieved Ace status. Two became Double Aces, one of which attained Triple Ace status.

### World War II Record

During World War II, 51st Fighter Group pilots battled Japanese pilots over the skies of India and China between October 1942 and August 1945. Pilots of the group's 16th, 25th, and 26th Fighter Squadrons flew the Curtiss P-40 Warhawk (until March 1944) and the North American P-51 Mustang (from March 1944) while pilots of the 449th Fighter Squadron (assigned in August 1943) flew the Lockheed P-38 Lightning.

Although the 51 FG had been based at Karachi, India, in March 1942, it did not achieve any level of combat readiness status until June 1942. The 16 FS was the first squadron to finally receive its full complement of P-40s, and was declared combat ready. Given the desperate situation in China, though, the 16 FS immediately was detached from the 51st and attached to the 23 FG, based in China. The 16 FS remained with the 23d until October 1943 when it rejoined the 51st. Meanwhile, the 25 FS was combat ready in September 1942 and the 26 FS in October 1942 at which time the squadrons moved with the group headquarters to the Assam Valley, in northeast India.

The group saw aerial combat action within a week after moving to Dinjan and Sookerting airfields in the Assam Valley. On 19 October 1942, 1st Lt Alvin B. Watson, 26 FS, recorded the group's first aerial victory of World War II. From then on, group pilots engaged Japanese aircraft whenever opportunities arose which were sporadic between October 1942 and October 1943. With the exception of Japanese air raids over the Assam Valley in late October 1942 (eight aerial victories) and the group's air defense of Fort Hertz, Burma, in February 1943 (12 aerial victories), pilots were credited with only 22 aerial victories.

After the group was reassigned to Fourteenth Air Force in October 1943, it moved to Kunming, China. From that location, squadron pilots deployed to various airfields in China, and aerial engagements with Japanese aircraft increased substantially. During its 22 months in China, group pilots recorded 148 aerial victories. In all, 111 group pilots received official credit for 170.58 aerial victories during World War II. Six pilots achieved Ace status—all while based in China.

### 51st Fighter Group Aces in World War II

<b>Rank/Name</b>	<b>Squadron</b>	<b>No. of Victories</b>	<b>Date of Ace Status</b>
Maj Robert L. Liles	16 FS	5	18 December 1943
1st Lt Edward M. Nollmeyer	26 FS	5	22 December 1943
2d Lt Lee O. Gregg	449 FS	7	4 March 1944
1st Lt Robert B. Schultz	449 FS	5	4 March 1944
Capt John F. Colman	26 FS	5	21 September 1944
1st Lt Keith Mahon	449 FS	5	5 January 1945

## Korean War Record

Within 2 weeks after North Korean forces invaded the Republic of Korea during the early morning of 25 June 1950, the 51st Fighter-Interceptor Wing, based at Naha AB, Okinawa, was alerted to prepare for possible combat duty.

By early September 1950, the wing finally received orders to deploy, and on 22 September 1950, relocated to Itazuke AB, Japan. From there, pilots of the 16th and 25th Fighter Interceptor Squadrons, flying the Lockheed F-80C Shooting Star, immediately conducted combat air patrol, close air support, and aerial reconnaissance missions over the Peninsula to support the breakout of the U.S. Eighth Army and Allied ground forces from the Pusan Perimeter.

The 51 FIW continued its primary ground-support type missions during the following 14 months over the Korean Peninsula while moving to four different bases. In November 1951, the wing converted to the North American F-86E Sabre, and was assigned an air-to-air superiority mission. From 1 December 1951 until 27 July 1953, the 51 FIW engaged in aerial combat against Chinese, Russian, and North Korean pilots flying the Soviet-made MiG-15.

Throughout the next 19+ months of combat action, 171 wing pilots amassed 310 aerial victories (308 MiG-15s, one Yak-3, and one IL-10). Fourteen pilots achieved Ace status with two reaching Double Ace and one of those pilots, Capt Joseph C. McConnell Jr., becoming a Triple Ace (16 MiG kills), and earning the title of Top USAF Ace of the Korean War.

### 51st Fighter Interceptor Wing Aces in the Korean War

Rank/Name	Squadron	No. of Victories	Date of Ace Status
Maj William T. Whisner	25 FIS	5.5	23 February 1952
Col Francis S. Gabreski	51 FIW/CC	6.5	1 April 1952
Capt Robert H. Moore	16 FIS	5	3 April 1952
Capt Iven C. Kincheloe Jr	25 FIS	5	6 April 1952
Maj William H. Wescott	25 FIS	5	26 April 1952
Maj Donald E. Adams	16 FIS	6.5	3 May 1952
1st Lt Cecil G. Foster	16 FIS	9	22 November 1952
1st Lt Harold E. Fischer	39 FIS	10	24 January 1953; <b>Double Ace</b> , 21 March 1953
Capt Dolphin D. Overton	16 FIS	5	24 January 1953
Capt Joseph C. McConnell Jr	39 FIS	16	16 February 1953; <b>Double Ace</b> , 24 April 1953 <b>Triple Ace</b> , 18 May 1953
Lt Col George I. Ruddell	39 FIS/CC	5	18 May 1953
Col Robert P. Baldwin	51 FIG/CC	5	22 June 1953
1st Lt Henry Buttelmann	25 FIS	7	30 June 1953
Maj John F. Bolt (USMC)	39 FIS	6	11 July 1953